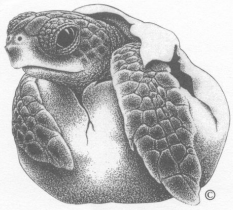


# Share the Beach

JULY 27, 2001



Share the Beach

## How to Contact us:

US Fish &  
Wildlife Service

251-441-5181  
1-866-SEA-TURTLE  
Ext 32 or 41  
Cell: 251-709-6920

## Sea Turtle Facts

**Leatherback**  
(*Dermochelys co-  
riacea*)

- Largest sea turtle; travels the farthest, dives the deepest and ventures into the coldest water
- Feeds on jelly-fish
- 700-2000 lbs!
- Dives to over 3000 ft
- Smooth, rubbery shell

Dear Sea Turtle Volunteers,

It has been a busy week for us, and we'd like to thank you all for your help, especially during the storm, and special thanks to those of you who went out and got soaked. We have a lot to discuss in this newsletter which include some important changes to our nest sitting protocol as well as updates and general information.

Our next meeting will be held at the **Gulf State Park Resort, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 PM.** We will now be holding monthly meetings, however our newsletter will continue to be published bi-weekly.

## Latest News: The Storm

The recent weather has caused some concern about our nests for two reasons. First of all, with the storm comes heavy wave action which can erode the beach and wash away some of our nests, especially those close to mean high tide. Secondly, standing water over nests that are close to hatching will easily drown any turtles that have emerged from their eggs.

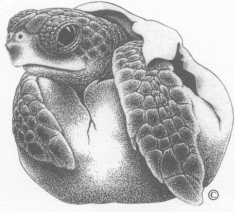
Thus, it was our goal to determine if any of our nests past the fifty five-day mark were covered with water, and if any of our nests were being eroded. The only one of our nests that was close to hatching and had been inundated was on Gulf State Park. The nest was excavated by Gulf State Park employees to check for hatchlings. None were found and 60 unhatched eggs were relocated.

No nests were washed away either, which is good but surprising news, as one of our nests at the Lighthouse in Gulf Shores, lies very close to the water. As most of you know, our relocation policy is simply no relocation. However in the case of erosion during a storm, some nests may be considered for relocation by USFWS employees/volunteers or GSP employees. This is why some of you received calls to check the status of your nests. In the case of standing water over a nest before the fifty five-day mark, there is no threat to the lives of the unhatched turtles unless they are submerged in water for an extended period of time. This is because the cooling effect of water prevents the eggs from incubating.

## Current Nest Status

So far only one nest has hatched. Our first nest hatched Friday, at Laguna Key. Surprisingly this is not the first nest that we expected to hatch. As of July 31, our first nest scheduled to hatch (Silver Beach) is on its 68<sup>th</sup> day. We believe it may be late because of the relatively cooler weather and lack of drought conditions,

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**Alpha** – Orange Beach/Perdido Bay  
**Bravo** – Romar Beach  
**Charlie** – Gulf State Park  
**Delta** – Gulf Shores Beach  
**Echo** – Laguna Key & West Beach West  
**Foxtrot I & II** – West Beach East  
**Gulf** – Fort Morgan



Floaters:  
Homer Singleton:  
251-943-8945  
Trent & Jill Scott:  
251-928-5967

which may increase the gestation period for a loggerhead up to 75 days. However it is hard to say right now whether this will be the case for our other nests. After another week or so we should start to see a trend in the hatch times and we will be better able to assess the situation and adjust our nest sitting schedules accordingly. Until then, please be ready for a nest to hatch as early as 55 days, i.e. we are staying with our original guidelines until further notice.

Our first hatch occurred on its 62nd day. Twenty seven hatchlings emerged out of a total of 109 eggs. The low success rate of the nest was due to invasion by sea oat roots. Thanks to everyone who helped watch this nest around the clock. Hopefully the rest of our nests will not require as much supervision.

### Trenching

Now for the trenching info you've all been waiting for. First of all we'd like to remind you that it is up to your team to decide whether it is appropriate to mark the trench with stakes and flagging tape. We'd prefer areas in front of condos, especially in Orange Beach, to be properly marked. However, this is not always possible and trenches may need to be built each evening. For example, the Lighthouse management preferred that we not mark the trench, and so it must be re-dug every night.

Protocol:

- 1) Trenching, until further notice, should begin on the 57<sup>th</sup> day after the eggs were laid.
- 2) Trenches should be at least 12-18" wide, 9" deep, and should lead straight to the water's edge.
- 3) Trenches can be made with shovels, hands, by dragging a cider block with rope, or with any other idea you can come up with (so long as it does not involve heavy machinery).

### Flashlights and Media

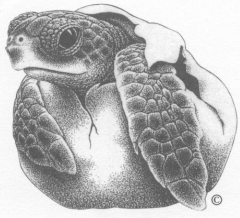
We've ordered red filter film appropriate for use on flashlights, flash cameras, and other lights when nest sitting and helping hatchlings. This film will filter out most short wavelengths of light and only allow light that the turtles cannot see pass through. This means we can see what we are doing and avoid distracting the turtles at the same time. You will be able to pick this film up from your team leaders in West Beach or Laguna Key and it will also be available at the Nature Center. Simply cut out the small amount you need and tape it over your flashlights and camera flashes. Vóila, turtle compatible light!

If you are interested in filming hatchlings, a night vision camera will work very well. The nesting video shown at our hatchling meeting was taken using night vision, and as you can see, it looks great. We will be using one to videotape the hatchlings so we'll have plenty of footage to show next year, this time from our own beach.

### Important Reminders!

Please call us with pole numbers from streetlights and the dates they need to be shut

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off (55-day marks)! The sooner we get this done, the better.

Our cell phone number: 709-6920. Write this down. If you need to contact us during the day, or have a turtle related emergency at night, please call us.

We will do nest excavation 72 hours after the hatchlings start to emerge. If you would like to participate in excavation please let us know. Excavation is not to be done without USFWS personnel present or without the direct consent of Celeste South (with the exception of Gulf State Park). In that same vein, please do not dig into the nest to see what the hatchlings are up to. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation regarding this matter.

If you need equipment it can be picked up at GSP Nature Center. Talk to Kelly or C.J. and they can give you what you need.

Please don't forget to have people sign your permission slips to **trench and nest sit**.

Also, listed in the margin are the floaters and their numbers. They want you to call them if you need help filling in sitting time slots, etc..

Happy Turtling



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

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